

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A method for balancing the load of requests from a plurality of network devices for service from a selected one of a plurality of service providers, said devices and said service providers being interconnected by a network, said method comprising the steps of:
  - a) in each of said devices, storing a location code indicative of geographic locations of said devices;
  - b) in each of said devices, storing a table relating geographic location codes and network addresses for said service providers; and
  - c) said devices being programmed so that a requesting device initiates a request by:
    - c1) retrieving said location code for said requesting device;
    - c2) accessing said table to retrieve a service provider address associated with a service provider location code geographically closest to said retrieved location code; so that utilization of the service providers is systematically load balanced with respect to the geographical location of the client
    - c3) addressing said initiated request with said retrieved service provider address; and

d) accessing by said devices a seed system to download an updated table if said devices cannot access the service provider retrieved from said table.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein at least one of said network devices is a mailing device.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein at least an approximate distance between two geographic locations can be calculated as a function of location codes corresponding to said two locations.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein said location codes are zip codes used by a postal service.

5. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein a group of said service providers share a common location code and selected ones of those of said devices which are closest to said group address initiated a request to a primary service provider in said group; said method further comprising the step of: said selected devices addressing said initiated request to an alternate service provider in said group if they cannot log on to said primary service provider.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5 further comprising the step of: said selected devices accessing said table to retrieve another service provider address associated with a service provider location code next closest to said retrieved location code if they cannot log on to said primary or said alternate service provider.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of: said devices accessing said table to retrieve another service provider address associated with a service provider location code next closest to said retrieved location code if they cannot log on to said service provider.

8. (Cancelled Currently)

9. (Amended) A network device, said device receiving service from a selected one of a plurality of service providers when said device and said service providers are interconnected by a network, said device comprising:

a) a first data store storing a location code indicative of said device's geographic location;

b) a second data store storing a table relating geographic location codes and network addresses for said service providers; and

c) said device being programmed to initiate a request by:

c1) retrieving said location code for said device;

c2) accessing said table to retrieve a service provider address associated with a service provider location code geographically closest to said retrieved location code; so that utilization of the service providers is systematically load balanced with respect to the geographic location of the client;

c3) addressing said initiated request with said retrieved service provider address; and

d) accessing by said devices a seed system to download an updated table if said devices cannot access the service provider retrieved from said table.

10. (Original)        The device of claim 9 wherein said network device is a mailing device.

11. (Original)        The device of claim 9 wherein at least an approximate distance between two geographic locations can be calculated as a function of location codes corresponding to said two locations.

12. (Original)        The device of claim 11 wherein said location codes are zip codes used by a postal service.

13. (Original)        The device of claim 9 wherein a group of said service providers share a common location code, said device addressing said initiated request to a primary service provider in said group, and said device being further programmed to address said initiated request to an alternate service provider in said group if said device cannot log on to said primary service provider.

14. (Original)        The device of claim 13 wherein said device is further programmed to access said table to retrieve another service provider address associated with another service provider location code next closest to said retrieved location code if said device cannot log on to said primary or said alternate service provider.

15.(Original) The device of claim 9 wherein said device is further programmed to access said table to retrieve another service provider address associated with another service provider location code next closest to said retrieved location code if said device cannot log on to said service provider.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Amended) A network comprising a plurality of network devices and a plurality of service providers, said devices receiving service from selected ones of said service providers when said devices and said service providers are interconnected by said network, said devices each comprising:

a) a first data store storing a location code indicative of that device's geographic location;

b) a second data store storing a table relating geographic location codes and network addresses for said service providers; and

c) each of said devices being programmed to initiate a request by:

c1) retrieving said location code for said device;

c2) accessing said table to retrieve a service provider address associated with a service provider location code geographically closest to said retrieved location code; so that utilization of the service providers is systematically load balanced with respect to the geographic location of the client.

c3) addressing said initiated request with said retrieved service provider address; and

d) accessing by said devices a seed system to download an updated table if said devices cannot access the service provider retrieved from said table.

18. (Original)            The network of claim 17 wherein at least one of said devices is a mailing device.

19. (Original)            The network of claim 17 wherein at least an approximate distance between two geographic locations can be calculated as a function of location codes corresponding to said two locations.

20. (Original)            The network of claim 19 wherein said location codes are zip codes used by a postal service.

21. (Original)            The network of claim 17 wherein a group of said service providers share a common location code, selected ones of those of said devices which are closest to said group addressing said initiated request to a primary service provider in said group; said selected devices being further programmed to address said initiated request to an alternate service provider in said group if they cannot log on to said primary service provider.

22. (Original)            The network of claim 21 wherein said selected devices are further programmed to access said table to retrieve another service provider address associated with another service provider location code next closest to said retrieved location code if they cannot log on to said primary or said alternate service provider.

23. (Original)        The network of claim 17 wherein said devices are further programmed to access said table to retrieve another service provider address associated with another service provider location code next closest to said retrieved location code if they cannot log on to said service provider.

24. (Amended)\_\_\_\_\_The network of claim 17 wherein said devices are further programmed to access a seed system to download an updated table if said table becomes invalid.

25. (Amended)        The method of claim 1, wherein the location code is a zip code.

26. (Amended)        The method of claim 9, wherein the location code is a zip code.

27. (Amended)        The method of claim 17, wherein the location code is a zip code.